HARAMBEE FLAME

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IN THIS TIME AND PLACE

We looked for our brother, but he was dead. The police had killed him. We searched for our sister but she had died of loneliness. Her children run through the street, desperately singing the song of her spirit. Their swollen lips are cracked, but still they sing their sad song.

Outside the bar our brother, loaded down with the responsibilities to us implied by his college degrees, plays spin himself as if he were a bottle. He is dizzy, falls to the pavement. An old ship creaks. Salt water laps up against the ancient wood. It is an insidious tongue that laps so hard, that scraps the hull with such relish as our own cries from that time echo even onto now.

We search for ourselves but among the sterile bricks of the city where faces have taken on the hardness of concrete. It is so hard to find anyone here and so tough to listen for familiar voices with the televisions so loud, with the radios so loud, with the tape decks so loud, with despair so loud. All these canned sounds released to fill the sky like unsure birds, pecking the concrete for meaning. We are not sure what we hear. We are not certain what we see.

But there was another time and space. The pages that tell of it have yellowed but speak nonetheless. We knew gods and did not need dogmas, knew land and did not require "no trespassing" signs, knew love and did not construct divorce courts. We did not breathe the air of paradise. We knew hunger sometimes, pain, sickness. But it was a good life because it was ours. It was a good life because we knew--and had no Sister Sledge to tell us--we were family.

But now it is not trees which give us shade but high-rises that block out the sun. Mad men obsessed with death neatly package molecular doom in shells and we stand beneath the ominous shadows of insanity marketed as ideas.

A president speaks in tongues as if we could, or would have to be, born again by falling for the trick of his words: "Ladies and gentlemen, ketchup is a vegetable." Shall we say, "Thank you, sir." It isn't necessary. He has assured us that he was only joking. We must not be very sophisticated. We do not catch the joke. We do not see the humor in being the butt of political jokes, economic jokes, social jokes.

Somehow, though, some of us manage laughter, manage songs because we have been strong. We have not given up the search because we know we're around here somewhere. We know that Ibo is around here somewhere, and Ashanti, Zulu, Massai, ...Some of us have the voices to laugh and sing because the E.F. Hutton sounds, the disco sounds, the death-cry sounds have not drowned us out. It is beautiful to be black when you know what you're looking for.

-editor

FROM OTHER SOURCES

Economic Survival--"...according to a report from the Commerce Department's Census Bureau...Median family income for Black families was $13,270 in 1981, compared with $23,520 for white families and $16,400 for Spanish-origin families. After adjusting for inflation, Black families experienced a 5.2 percent decline in their real median income...The number of poor children under 18 years old rose from 11.5 million in 1980 to 12.3 million in 1981, and the proportion of children below the poverty level rose from 18.3 to 29.8 percent...In 1981, 31.8 million, or one in seven Americans, were below the poverty level, an increase of 2.2 million persons over the 1980 total of 29.6...The number of Blacks below the poverty line rose by 618,000, from about 8.6 million in 1980 to 9.2 million in 1981. There were 21.6 million whites below the poverty level in 1981, up to 1.5 million from 1980..."

-MILWAUKEE COURIER(7/24/82)

Health--"...Since the end of WWII, the health of Blacks has been declining at an unbelievable rate. A 1979 report from the National Center for Health Statistics(NCHS) showed that the biggest causes of death among Blacks is not homicides, suicides, car accidents, or drug abuse, but disease(although these problems should be examined too). The NCHS data shows that Blacks die from more heart disease, cancer, strokes, influenza, and pneumonia. Black mortality rates are also higher than whites for these diseases, death from strokes is 75 percent higher in Blacks, death from cancer is 68 percent higher, and death from tuberculosis is 5 times higher in Blacks than Whites. Dorothy P. Rice director of NCHS says, 'The death rate for Blacks is 47 percent higher than for Whites.'...The problem of uncontrolled high blood pressure is the number one health disease facing Black Americans. Current national estimates from the American Heart Association(AHA) suggest that over 60 million people in America have some form of high blood pressure. The World Health Organization(WHO) figures are 35 million Americans are hypertensive of which five million are Black. However, epideaiological evidence suggests disease divided by the total population at risk is 66 percent higher in the Black community than the white...Black Americans diets is also a major factor for the higher blood pressure. The consumption of large amount of salt for seasoning, cooking, and in canned meats and vegetables, salty snacks and fast foods are dangerous for Blacks. Large amounts for salt intake is a killer. The reason for this is that salt retains fluids in the body, which inturn adds additional stress to the heart and circulatory system. Also studies have shown that Blacks tend to retain a higher amount of salt in the kidneys and salt excretion is less than it should be. No one is quite sure, but some researchers believe that this salt retention is a genetic factor, being a survival mechanism in parts of Africa where salt is scarce...Still, another factor is the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables and the excess use of pork and pork products...Studies of 1957 and 1973 show how many Blacks are extremely sensitive to pork. Besides causing an increase in blood pressure, Blacks also suffer other reactions including dizziness, nausea, belching, vomiting, headaches, indigestion, gas, blurred vision, diarrhea, faintness, crying, burning stomach, hotness, weakness, and more. ..The major causes of all diseases among Blacks is the large consumption of meat...In countries where meat is not eaten as much or at all, diseases like these(heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure) are unknown..."

-BLACK NEWS(Vol. 4, No. 21)

Editor: Spelling or grammatical errors you may find from time to time in "From Other Sources" come from those other sources.

SOME THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE

-An end to the practice of American-born Afrikans calling each other "niggers" and otherwise downgrading each other on the base of color or nationality which we share in common;

-Afrikans(from the homeland) getting out of the suits and ties of this culture and getting back into the Afrikan dress. American-born Afrikans to be able to see visible signs of our original culture;

-American-born Afrikan men ceasing to refer to our Sisters as "bitches," "hos," etc.;

-A willingness on the part of American-born Afrikan parents to put restrictions on their and their children's time spent in front of the television and to spend more time of value with their children;

-More American-born Afrikan doctors, lawyers, and other professionals remaining in their own communities and working with others for reconstruction of their communities, instead of trying to prove they have "made it" by moving out with the white folks;

-A concerted effort to secure a non-profit, community-access radio station in Omaha to serve the Black community.

OUR THANKS TO

Sisters Alva Barnett and Angela Perry for coming out here to the prison recently to conduct a program on relationships between American-born Afrikan women and men. What is there for us to have if it is not each other? We appreciate these Sisters' willingness to give, to share with us.

If you would like to attend one of our Monday evening(5:30) meetings, contact Scott Marshall at 471-3161.

PUBLICATIONS

Periodically the HARAMBEE FLAME lists some publications. We do this because it is vitally important that all of us keep abreast of developments in various areas, both of the world and of issues of concern. It is extremely important that we be well-read and that we be able to have understanding of events and developments. Things are moving too fast for us to be any less than vigilant. By reading from sources other than just the Establishment press, we are enabled to cross-check information and make sensible judgements as to the validity and accuracy of the information we receive.

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11238

AIM QUARTERLY
P.O. Box 20554
Chicago, Ill.
60620

THE BLACK SCHOLAR
300 Brannan St.
San Francisco, CA
94120

APPEAL TO REASON
495 Ellis St., No. 237
San Francisco, CA
94102

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Publications interested in receiving submissions of poetry, short stories, etc.: QUINDARO
P.O. Box 5224
Kansas City, Kansas
66119

AIM QUARTERLY
(same address as above)

DAWN MAGAZINE
628 No. Eutaw St.
Baltimore, Maryland
21201

rain

like diamonds strewn in ostracism
inanimating concertina wire
and perfected perfidy
silent flashes capture this mind
messages in baby steps
a heaven
close and distant
to cravings that plead peace
naked
in front of thunder
made by reactionary folk
feigning happiness serenity
and a hereafter
if
i extol only your flag
(so red white and blue, only)
your god
and ask not my true thoughts
like why kakistocracy?
then it is my soul who plays the mute
to the rain
that unearths that christens
graves of souls still not free
and what if the first god was an ape
o rain, o rain.

-Wili

(This Brother, Wili Otey, is a prisoner at the Nebraska State Pen. He is on DEATH ROW. Wili has had one book of poetry published, AND ME I AM LIKE THE LEAF.)

FINAL HAND

Man attempts to skip out
on life's final wager
avoiding stakes like dying or
one's death
preferring to be the fool
of obsession in days
while ignoring probabilities' fate
banking on tomorrow
gambling his morality at tables
of random chance
holding onto beginner's luck as
a continuous streak of youth
dealing time in monetary values
shuffling cards of old age
stacking the deck
passing as an absent minded
solitary player until
eventually... Destiny himself
sits in the game
raising the anty
too high to be bluffed
as he palms a royal flush
he lays cards on the table
calling in long overdue markers

-ruth d. jones

(This Sister is living and working in Omaha.)

L I F E R H Y T H M S

JULIUS

impalas sail in graceful bounds
above tall savannah grass
to brush against the sky

an eagle swoops and soars
to strike against the ground below
majestic shadows
that come and go to dance
their shade ballet

as men entranced
throw up futile hands
as if to block the ball
carried so sweetly aloft
by one whose eagle's dance
makes these giants' height seem small

looming toward the hoop
his arms like long brown wings
to arch above opposing troops
and stuff the ball
through knotted strings

proud defenders of the goal
shake their heads from side to side
drop their faces as they move upcourt
like lions lick the hurt
to soothe their wounded pride.

-david l. rice

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Submit your poems for consideration as to appearance in the FLAME to:

Editor/David L. Rice
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68502-0500